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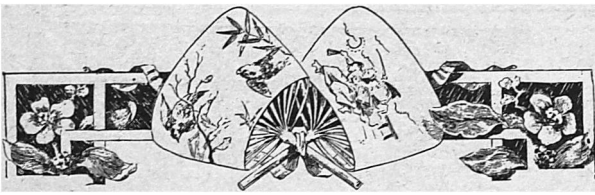
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FRENCH HOUSE FURNISHING.

BY THEODORE CHILD.

THE LIBRARY.

"ONLY think," said Voltaire, "that the whole known universe, except the savage nations, is governed by books." Another writer, M. L. Derome, says: "In the furniture of cultivated society, books hold the place of honor; they are symbols of superiority." So, unless you are willing to pass for a savage or an inferior being, you must open your door to books. You must devote some thought to book cases, to the installation of a library, to the choice of your books. Most modern writers who have treated the subject of bibliophilism, or the love of books, would seem to have been guided in their remarks by a desire to discourage the novice who may happen to feel within him incipient symptoms of the gentle mania. They start out with a grand display of erudition, continue by proving that the books worth collecting are within the reach of none but millionaires, and end by a jocose reference to exploded legends of wonderful "finds" made in the old bookshops of London or along the quais of Paris. With all due respect for the erudition and practical experience of these writers, I am inclined to suspect them of snobbishness. In modern bibliophilism, there is a great deal of snobbishness. Nay, the *douce manie* which, like angling, should naturally be the passion and recreation of contemplative and simple folks, has even come to be subjected to the caprices of fashion.

To a certain extent this was inevitable. Bibliophilism has become a science, having its archives, its annals, its historical monuments. Like the bric-a-brac mania, it has become largely a research of the debris of past ages, debris necessarily limited in quantity, and for which the demand is constantly increasing. In modern times, too, books, which have always held a place of honor among the chattels of civilized society, have acquired a new destination; they have entered the category of furniture under the class of objects of art, and, in the prices paid for them, the binding, the illustrations, and in a word the matter of the book form only one element often inferior in importance to the elements of origin, rarity, or antiquity.

In the material arrangement of libraries, it is useless to push our investigations very far back; the modern printed book requires a different resting place from the rolls of manuscript with their fine labels that were the pride and delight of Cicero in his villas at Antium, Cumæ and Tusculum. Still, it will always be interesting for book lovers to know that at Rome the library, like the picture gallery, was constructed with great magnificence and by preference with an eastern exposure. In order the better to preserve the parchment rolls from moth and mould, the shelves were made of cedar or ivory. In the middle of the room there stood invariably a statue of Minerva, and around the room Mercury, Hercules, painted portraits or busts in bronze, silver, and even gold, of the great men of antiquity, placed generally on square pedestals and

very often two on the same pedestal, as, for instance, Herodotus and Thucydides, Archilochus and Homer. In the museum of the Louvre, there is a double pedestal or "Hermes" of Archilochus and Metrodorus, which must have come out of some Roman library. These busts also were placed on brackets against the wall. Outside were vast porticoes with columns and spacious terraces for walking, the exercise of the body facilitating that of the mind. Between the columns *plutei* of marble, hollowed out and adorned with bas-reliefs, received flowers and rare plants.

According to all authorities, the first point to be determined is the exposure of our library. The north is too cold; the south is too hot and too sunny; the west has the disadvantage of prolonged heat, deadly to woodwork and favorable to insects, beside that of damp and rainy winds, and damp is fatal to books. Vitruvius recommends an eastern exposure, and Peignot, Naudé—who formed the collection of Cardinal Mazarin and Christine of Sweden—Caillot, Charles Nodier, and Rovveyre in his excellent treatise on the *Connaissances nécessaires au bibliophile*, are of the same opinion. The great enemies of books are dust, damp, and insects, and the two former promote the generations of the latter. The experts, therefore, recommend the opening of the windows and doors of book cases on fine days, the dusting of the volumes at least once in three months, and the beating of them once or twice a year. Amongst other essential conditions for the preservation of books, the same experts recommend for the construction of the book case destined to receive choice volumes, the employment of cedar, cypress, mahogany, ebony, sandal wood, or, at least, very dry and very sound oak. The very compact, dense, and highly aromatic woods are alone proof against insects.

"Books, and above all, bindings," says M. Jules Richard in his *Art de former une bibliothèque*, "need air. A book is a living being, it must breathe. I am convinced, from experience, that in the long run a bound volume gets less spoiled on an open shelf than in a closely shut cupboard. Our ancestors, who combined prudence with knowledge, used often to put doors to their book cupboards, but these doors were merely covered with wire netting."

For a practical working library the books will be arranged on open shelves, say of dry oak, comfortably lined with cloth. Owing to the exiguity of Parisian dwellings, it is the custom to make the book shelves of sufficient depth to hold two or three rows of books, one behind the other.

This plan economizes space, but at the total sacrifice of all convenience. As regards the arrangement of the shelves, the general plan, all the world over, is folios at the bottom, then quartos, then octavos, and so on upwards. There is a story told of a Swedish notability, minister of an illustrious queen, who, in order to follow an august example, charged the learned Vossius with the formation of a library for himself.

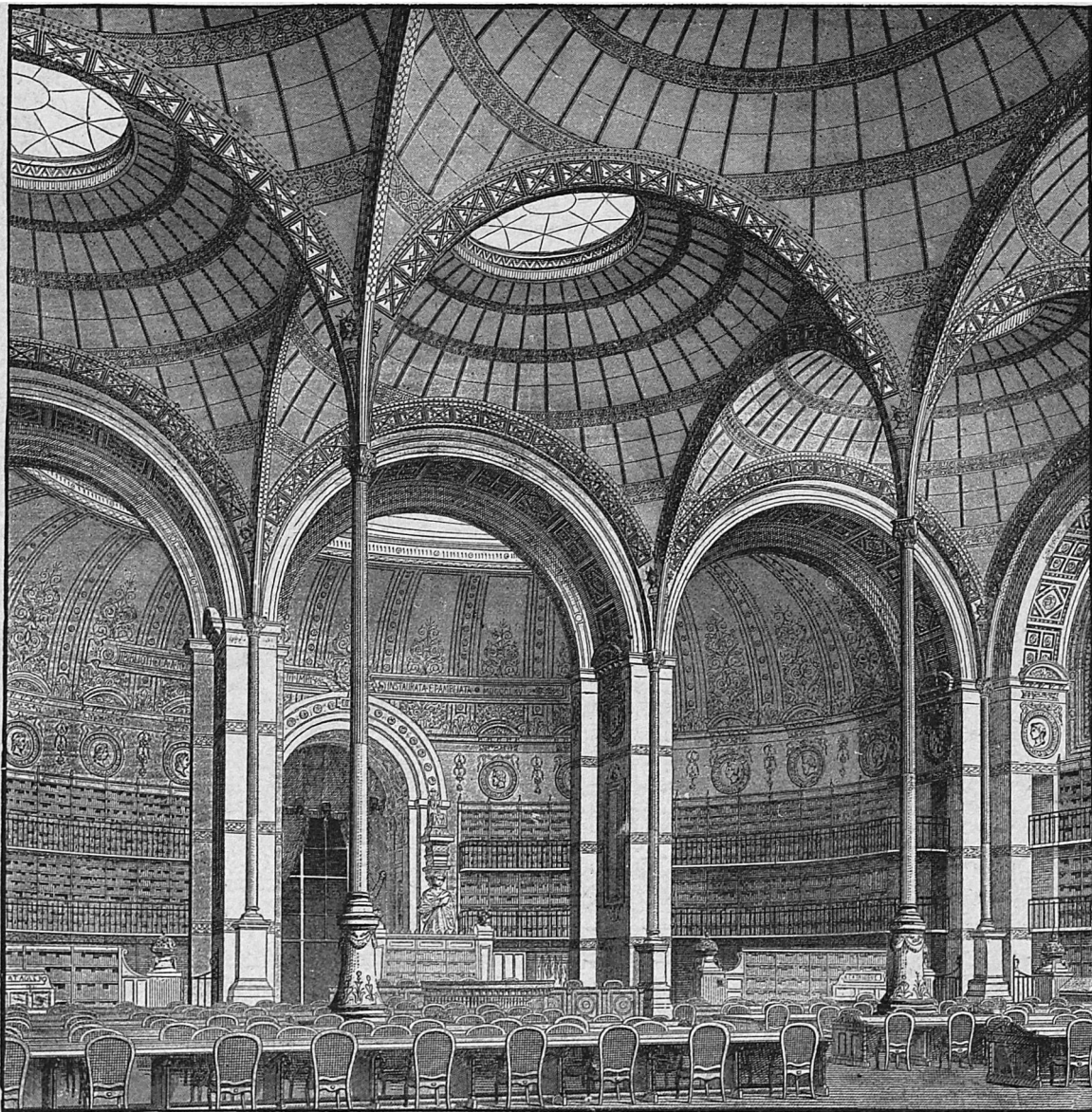
"Of what sort of works does your excellence wish the library to be composed?" asked Vossius.

"Small volumes for the top shelves, and large ones for the bottom shelves, like Queen Christine's library," was the minister's reply.

In point of fact this arrangement is ridiculous when carried beyond a certain point. We will admit wide shelves at the bottom for the quartos and for the volumes in folio, a size now out of use; but all the other shelves we will place at equal distances from each other, wide enough to admit the tallest octavo and to leave a space above it, say 12 to 14 inches between each shelf. The reasonableness of this distribution is obvious; we do not classify books by their size, but by their subject. Then you will have on one shelf books of all forms and sizes? it will be objected. Certainly, I reply, and the effect will be most picturesque. And not only will the books be of all forms and sizes, but their bindings will be of all colors, and this very multiplicity of colors, the greater or less richness of the gilded backs, the mixture of modern binding with old calf or morocco, the neighborhood of vellum and Russia leather, the contrast of old and new, of the severe and of the gay—all this forms a charming decoration, the most amusing and reposeful decoration for a room that exists. This is the way that M. Edmond de Goncourt has arranged his library and working-room in his house at Auteuil: the ceiling is covered with black velvet, and in the middle is stretched on the black ground the dress of a Japanese tragedian, and two furious Corean ilons woven in gold of divers tones struggling in the midst of a wild growth of peonies and enormous flowers of all colors. The walls of the room are painted deep red, and against them are arranged the bookcases of ebonized oak. On the wall opposite the fire place is a cabinet, or, rather, a stand of ebony destined to hold the dozens of portfolios in which are kept the Goncourt collection of XVIIIth century drawings, etc.; on the top of this cabinet are some Japanese bronzes and over it, the portrait of M. de Goncourt, in pastel by de Nittis. The advantages of having

the shelves wide apart are, besides facility of classification of books, the facility of taking them out, the facility of dusting them, and the fact that thus the books have plenty of air. Of course another plan is to have adjustable shelves against which there is nothing to be said, provided the means of adjustment be of extreme simplicity, and leave no nooks and corners for the importunate dust.

Generally, I am aware, people will object to this arrangement of wide shelves on the ground that it is disagreeable to see the bare wall at the back. This is a mere question of habit and also of the tone of the wall, and this leads me to say that there is, of course, no necessity for having our book shelves black and our walls red, rather than any other color. The color is simply a matter of taste, temperament, and appropriateness to the nature of the library. A collection of austere and serious books demands a severe lodging; law and theology, for instance, would not brook the neighborhood of the smiling creations of Japanese art or the graceful bibelots of the XVIIIth century. On the other hand a collec-



NATIONAL LIBRARY, PARIS.

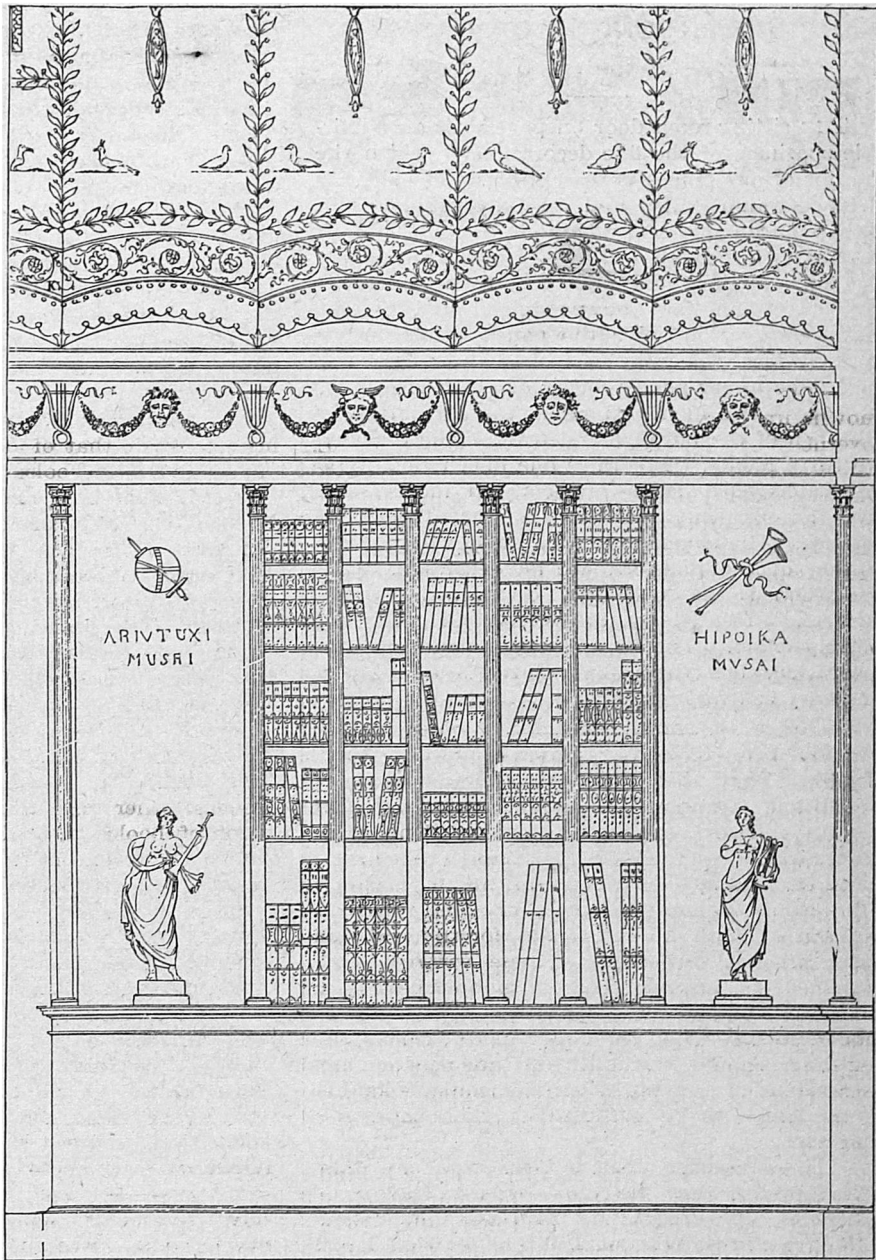
tion of books on art and curiosity, or a collection of pure literature, may be lodged just as the owner's taste directs. If I may be allowed to refer to my own imaginings, I will briefly describe a room I have fitted up for the reception of a part of my books. The walls are hung with Japanese matting of the palest new-mown hay and straw tones woven in stripes hung vertically; the basement is of straw color and red matting woven in a very small pattern; the washboard is of pine stained canary yellow and lacquered so that the whole grain is left visible; the matting on the wall is paneled with bands of pine wood stained canary yellow. The doors and wood work are of pine stained canary yellow; the ceiling is colored yellow, and in the middle of it, occupying the whole space, except a border of about three feet wide, is stretched a Jenorse printed calico square, on the white ground of which is a strange polychrome conventional tree covered with brilliant flowers; at the foot of the tree grotesque animals, and around the edges a dazzling border of flowers of all colors. Along one wall are bookshelves of slender pine planks, and along the other wall other shelves and a chest of draw-trays for storing engravings, surmounted by nests of drawers for papers, and oddly-shaped compartments for books and documents. The shelves and the large piece of furniture for the reception of engravings, etc., are all of pine, stained canary yellow, and with the grain visible beneath the coating of white lacquer. The book shelves do not rise beyond easy reach of hand, and are surmounted by a dozen pieces of the yellowest and bluest Japanese porcelain and faience I could find. In this room, as all the walls are hung with matting, the back of the book shelves is also hung with matting. A more gay and sunny room than my canary yellow book cabinet I defy any one to conceive. Thanks to the wood work, the ceiling, and the yellow Indian muslin curtains, it always seems full of sunlight even on the dimmest winter day.

Many writers recommend the nailing of a leather fringe along each shelf of the bookcase, to keep the dust away. Where we have our wide and airy shelves this precaution will be useless, and, even where the shelves are adapted to the size of the volumes, the leather fringe is powerless against the insinuating enemy. Jules Janin had his shelves in his Passy Villa edged with silk fringe, which was prettier than leather but not more efficacious. The only way to keep the enemy, dust, at bay, is to dust frequently. Another enemy of books is gas, which deposits in the room where it is burnt a filthy coat of oil, and reduces book binding to the consistency of powder. Shaded lamps are the only lights suitable for a library. Finally, whatever you choose for the covering of the walls of your library, avoid paper; the French experts maintain that the paste used to hang it is favorable to the development of insects.

As for the furniture and adornment of the library, each man will arrange them to his own taste and to suit his requirements. One man will

have his walls covered with books from floor to ceiling, and have nothing but a bronze or two on his table or chimney-piece; such a man is M. Sarcy, the celebrated critic, who has lodged his library in an immense studio, around which he has had a gallery built. Others will have their working room and library encumbered with pictures and statuettes and objects of art of all kinds; such a man is Alexander Dumas. Others will mix up books and china; and others will hang a panoply of arms or souvenir of distant travel side by side with the classic, ancient and modern, on which the world has pronounced its verdict once for all. In these details one cannot say that the French do thus and thus, and the Anglo-Saxon thus and thus. Each man pleases himself.

The reader will find accompanying this article a sketch of the great reading-room of the National Library at Paris, commonly called "The Mosque," on account of the conformation of the roof, supported by elegant and slender iron pillars. The room, it will be seen, is lighted entirely from the top; the bookcases are of unstained oak; the general tonality light blue-gray with polychrome ornaments relieved by gilding and with foliage frescoes in the lateral bays. Another illustration shows one end of the library of the general hospital at Rheims, a beautiful specimen of Louis XIV. decoration. Yet another cut shows the decoration of the wall and vaulted ceiling of the library in the Hôtel Marboeuf, an excellent specimen of the Neo-Greek style that succeeded the Louis XVI. style, and to which some of the best modern French architects display a tendency to return. The basement and all the wood work is of mahogany. The pillars, too, are of mahogany with gilt bronze feet and capitals. The statues are of white marble, and the wall of the panels in

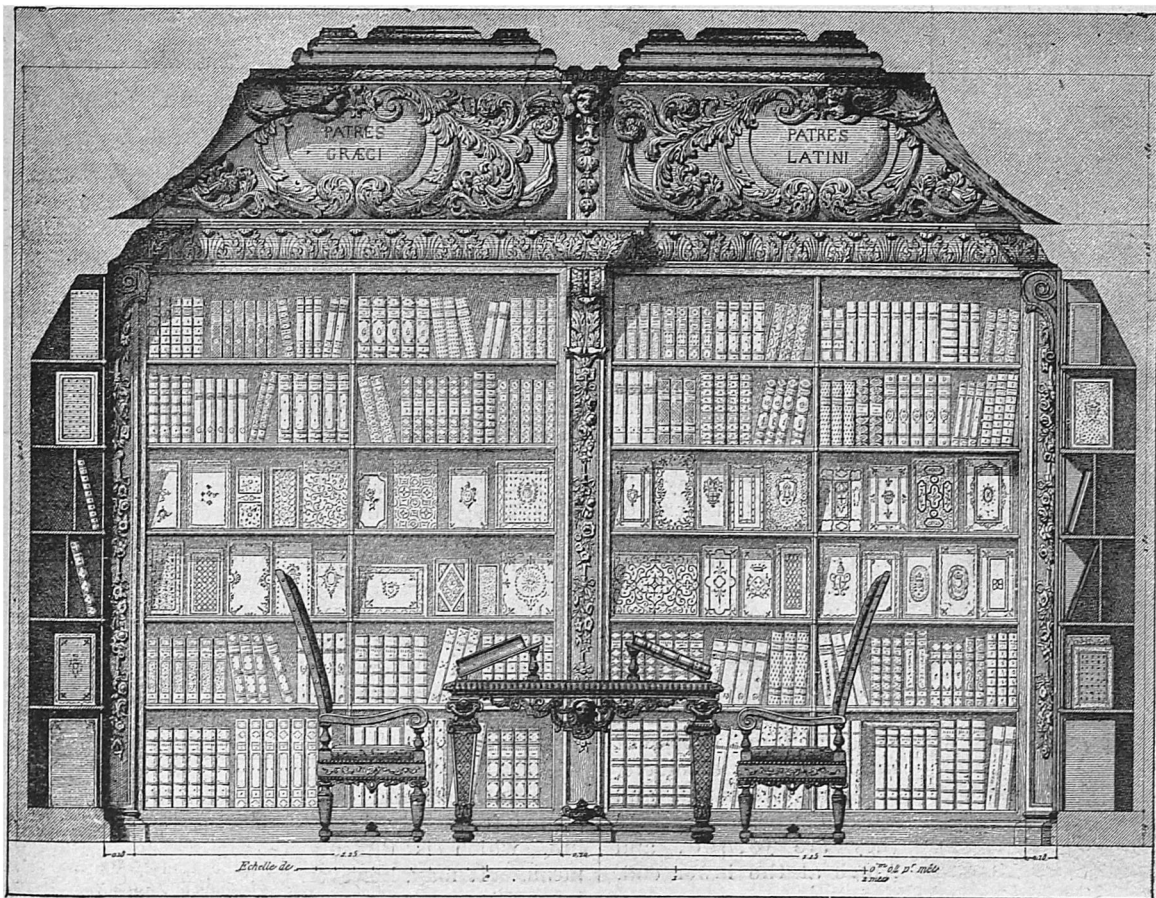


LIBRARY IN THE HOTEL MARBOEUF.

which they stand is of yellow stucco; the architrave and cornice are of white stucco, and the intervening frieze of yellow stucco. The vault of the ceiling is white stucco on which the ornaments and foliage are painted. The ornamental scroll border is painted on a band of vermillion.

To conclude these desultory remarks about the storing and housing of libraries, I will transcribe Jules Janin's charming panegyric of books which will, I think, be new to most of my readers. "O, master-pieces, beauties, graces, consolations, wisdom! O, books, our friends, our guides, our counsellors, our glories, our confession! We study them, we love them, we honor them. And just as the ancients placed in a corner of their dwelling a little altar decked with verberna, and on that domestic altar a familiar god, so the true bibliophile will adorn his house with these beautiful things. Whether he enters his dwelling or quits it he glances at his propitious gods. He recognizes them with a smile; he salutes them in all gratitude, in all respect. He takes honor to himself, too, from these illustrious friendships; he boasts of them. Books have, furthermore, this that is useful and rare: they put us at once on intimate terms with the best of mankind; they are the conversation of the most distinguished minds, the ambition of candid souls, the ingenious dream of philosophers in all parts of the world; sometimes, too, they give renown, imperishable renown to men who would be perfectly unknown without their books. They add even to accepted glory. By the catalogue of his books we know a man. He is there in his sincerity. There is his dream, and there his loves. Grant us, great gods, a sufficient provision of fine volumes to accompany us during our life and to bear witness to us after our death!"

FASHION OF FURNITURE.—Cabinet-makers have a sense of discretion in their designs, and knowing that what is cumbrous and hard to move cannot long be endured by the public, and consequently will not remain in fashion, if introduced, compromised by bringing forward the lighter mode of the Louis Quatorze time. The exhumation of the buried city of Pompeii has given our cabinet-makers a hint which they have not been slow to profit by, and we have had Pompeian furniture in our best rooms. All these efforts to please the eye may be, in their turn, successful, but have they the lasting nature of real comfort in them? Some will think not.—*Christian Million.*



LIBRARY IN THE GENERAL HOSPITAL AT REIMS.